

STR looking at altering green waste collection



Green waste totes could replace cans full of yard debris. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Specific bins for green waste may be coming to South Tahoe Refuse customers.

The garbage company, which operates on the South Shore in El Dorado and Douglas counties, conducted a pilot program this fall to see how customers liked the service.

About 125 households near Sierra House Elementary School were given a green 90-gallon garbage tote to use from Sept. 8-Oct 27. Only yard waste was to be deposited in the bin.

Decreasing injuries and lessening the cost at **Full Circle Compost** are the main reasons STR is contemplating the green waste can.

“Green waste is where we have the heaviest lifting,” Jeanne Lear with South Tahoe Refuse said. Bags or cans of waste can weigh 30 pounds.

The company’s workers’ comp bills went up 19.4 percent in the

last year. Lowering that bill by having employees stay healthy would presumably be a positive outcome with the totes.

STR reps gave an update on the pilot program to the South Lake Tahoe Waste Management Authority board in November.

STR retrofitted a truck in order to be able to mechanically lift the totes. Doing so on all of the trucks for all types of waste is not being talked about. But the company is contemplating green waste collection via a provided tote as becoming the norm. A final decision has not been made, though.

How many trucks to retrofit and the cost to customers need to be analyzed.

During the pilot there was a 95 percent participation rate, with households using it 57 percent of the time. Eighty-five percent liked the convenience. Overall, 72 percent preferred the tote. Almost half still had extra bags of yard waste to be picked up. About a third said storing the tote in winter would be problematic.

STR takes most of its green waste to Full Circle Compost in Minden. The company charges STR a fee for contamination, which is mostly the bags people put the waste in. Using the totes would eliminate much of the contamination as long as people adhered to putting in only green waste. In the pilot program the contamination level was less than 1 percent.

Getting more green waste out of normal trash collection would also help keep it from going to the landfill. All garbage companies in California are required to recycle 50 percent of the waste they collect – known as the diversion rate. The goal per the state is 75 percent in 2020. STR is currently at about 64 percent.